

The purpose of this chapter is to assist districts in understanding the purpose for the Arkansas School Facility Manual and the steps involved in creating equitable and efficient learning environments for the children of Arkansas.

Improving the equitability and efficiency of education of the students of Arkansas is a common goal of all its citizens. Part of that improvement process is to remediate the building and facility inadequacies where our students learn. These school facility planning guidelines have been developed to assist local school district officials in complying with the planning requirements of the State of Arkansas. They will expedite the completion of the necessary forms and will help Commission Officials review and approve plans.

School Districts will “base its Facilities Master Plan on the provisions of the Public School Academic Facility Manual as adopted by the Commission for Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation and on priorities indicated by statewide assessment and other pertinent data specific to the needs of the school district with regard to academic facilities and equipment.” (Act 1426 of 2005)

The State of Arkansas operates 1,205 schools and 5, 766 school-related permanent buildings in 254 school districts. In the 1960s and 1990s, Arkansas, along with many other areas of the country, saw a surge of new school construction; however, some of Arkansas’s first schools opened its doors over 80 years ago. Nearly all of Arkansas schools were constructed prior to current building codes and standards. Since the opening of the first school to present day, there have been new codes and standards published for virtually every building system ranging from air quality and HVAC to technology and fire and safety; therefore, most all of the schools within the state are not compliant.

The accumulation of aging structures and deferred maintenance has created many emergencies during the last decade (e.g. failing heating and cooling systems, deteriorating walls and foundations, inoperable windows, leaking roofs, etc.). There is much that must be done in the next ten years to make all districts’ buildings Code compliant, equal to adopted State Standards as defined within the Arkansas School Facility Manual, and consistently operating in an efficient and equitable measure.

Effectively addressing the significant assessment of facilities issues and at the same time building a new generation of forward looking, technologically capable schools will require a multi-faceted funding strategy as well as long range Master Planning. Both the capital and operating budgets must be focused on a plan that is complementary and broad-based.

The Facility Master Plan is designed to provide Equitable and Efficient learning environments for all students in Arkansas. The evolving needs and programmatic initiative require that facility usage be adapted to support the desired educational environment. A continued relationship of collaboration between the Division of Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation and the Superintendents will ensure that students, teachers, and principals are provided with facilities equitable to the educational mission of the State of Arkansas.